(b) if so, the details thereof, and

(c) the action taken to probe the matter and ensure that antinational elements do nQt infiltrate into the armed forces?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) In the Branch Recruiting Office, Siliguri, while carrying out a verification of documents, in the recent past it was found that approximately 25 candidates had submitted fake residential certificates and transf.er certificates for recruitment in the Army. The matter was immediately reported along with all relevant documents to the civil authorities for necessary action against the culprits.

To ensure that anti-national elements do not infiltrate/enter into the Armed Forces all relevant documents including Ration Cards, Voter. Identity Cards, Educational Documents and Character Certificates etc. are thoroughly verified in consultation with the civil/ concerned authorities. Such verification is conducted both at pre and post enrolment stages.

Destruction of armoured tanks in fire at Sonukhshetra, Rajasthan

†*613 Dr. A.K. PATEL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the armoured tanks kept in a military complex at Sonukhshetra of Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan have been destroyed due to fire incident there;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the said fire incident was an act of terrorists; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take to save ammunition/ armament Depots from such fires?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (d) A fire incident in a tank of 18 Cavalry of 4 Independent Armoured Brigade occurred on 26th January, 2002. The Unit was

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

located at Sanu, Jaisalmer District of Rajasthan. The fire broke out when the tank was started with the purpose of recharging the batteries. Since the tank was fully loaded with ammunition, the fire spread quickly within the tank resulting in explosion of ammunition stored inside the tank. The tank along with integral weapons, ammunitions and other operational stores was damaged. There was no loss of life, either military or civil.

Preliminary investigations have established that the fire incident was caused due to short circuit in the electric systems of the tank and was not due to any terrorist activity.

In order to avoid such incidents in the future, all formations and Unit Commanders have been advised to observe extreme caution while handling equipments loaded with ammunition or fuel and take adequate preventive measures. These would include proper insultation and connection of wiring circuitry of the tanks, ensure that batteries are properly secured and leads do not short circuit, connections of additional Radio Sets are properly secured, there is no contact of inflammable material with fuel or ammunition, there is proper storage of ammunition in the tanks and regular inspection of tanks by Commanders and formation repair teams.

In order to avoid recurrence of fire incidents in ammunition depots, the following steps have been taken:

(a) all depots have been directed to update safety and security instructions.

(b) all depots have been inspected by a Board of Officers to check adequacy of safety and security arrangements.

(c) Shortage in fire-fighting equipment is being made up and defective equipments repaired.

(d) Unserviceable ammunition is being disposed of on priority.

(e) Additional funds have been allotted for creation of more Explosive Storage Houses for storage of ammunition, presently stored on plinths under canvas.